

# Language fun - activities for developing language skills in young children

# Imagination

**Time:** 10 - 15 minutes **Materials:** An imagination chair. A chair decorated with bows, cushions or topic related materials.

**Activity:** Once a week have your child sit in the imagination chair and describe what they would do if they were a certain person or object.

**Suggested Script:** "If I were a queen, I would..."

"If I were a tree, I would..."

**Other Activities:** This can be done while in the car. Take turns. Use story book characters and watch the story change.



**chair**

## What's Missing?

**Time:** 10 - 15 minutes

**Materials:** Common household objects or small toys

**Activity:** Place a group of common objects on a table and give your child a few moments to study the collection. After your child has studied the group of objects, ask him to turn around. Remove one of the objects and ask your child to look at the group of objects again.

**Suggested Script:**

"What's missing?" If he cannot tell you, then encourage him to ask for clues, like, "What colour was it? Was it big or little?, was it soft or hard?"

**Other Activities:** To make the game more difficult, increase the number of objects and choose items that are similar in sizes and shape. You can also shorten the time that your child has to view the collection or the time that he has to determine what object you have removed. Another twist is to rearrange the collection in addition to removing an object.



## What's Different

**Time:** 20 minutes

**Materials:** hat, belt, scarf, sunglasses, and jewellery

**Activity:** Have your child study you for a few moments, then walk out of the room and change something about your appearance. Return and ask your child to guess what is different about you.

### **Suggested Script:**

Keep it obvious for young children like taking off your shoes and socks, putting on or taking off a hat, putting your shirt on backwards. For older children you can be more subtle with jewellery.

**Other Activities:** Let the child have a chance to be the one who changes.



## Feely Box

**Time:** 10 - 15 minutes

**Materials:** Common household objects or small toys

**Activity:** Place a common object in a box and cover with a cloth. Let your child put his hand under the cloth and feel the object. After your child has felt the object, ask him to guess what it is.

### **Suggested Script:**

"What shape is it? Is it hard or soft, big or little."



## Sequencing

**Time:** 10 - 15 minutes

**Materials:** nothing

**Activity:** While your child is getting dressed, ask what he/she would like to put on first, second, third, etc. This activity is fun because it is easy to get dressed any number of ways, but best of all your child is correct in almost any sequence provided.



# Secret Square Game Variations

## Same or Different

Select 25 tiles (1-3 players) or 36 tiles (4-6 players) and arrange them in an array, picture sides down. Students take turns turning over 2 tiles at a time. If they are able to perform the requested task\*, they get to hold the tiles as "points". Different players may have different tasks depending upon their needs/abilities. Possible tasks include:

- \*report one way in which the items are the same
- \*report one way in which the items are different
- \*report one likeness and one difference
- \*report a given number of likenesses or differences

## Describe It

A great activity for preschoolers or kids with cognitive delays. For this activity you will need a fabric or paper bag, a hat, or another receptacle suitable for drawing tiles. Again, you can select tiles that are appropriate to your theme/topic. The first player draws one tile. Everyone can see the tile. Elicit descriptions by asking appropriate questions:

- What colour is it?
- What is it made of?
- What is it used for?
- Who would use it?

Variations - you can rotate the questions about the tile from player to player or ask all of your students.

## I Spy or Categories

Place a selected number of tiles out on the table (random pattern) face up. The players should be seated in such a way that they can all reach the tiles. Have a stopwatch ready and a cup or other small receptacle in front of each child.. Tell the players they will have \_\_\_\_ seconds (45 works well for elementary age kids) to pick up as many of a certain kind of tile when you say "go". Emphasize that they should wait for you to say "go" - this lets you to allow processing time for those who need it and time for players to ask for repetition or clarification. To level the playing field for kids with fine motor challenges I also have my students pick one tile at a time and drop it into their cup before getting another.

## Guess My Tile

For this variation you will need "Scrabble" type tile holders or another barrier that allows each child to see his or her own tiles but no one else's. Spread the tiles picture side down and have each child select 4 or 5 and place on his or her rack. The person who is "it" then decides which tile to put into play and begins to describe it using functional, sensory, categorical or other types of descriptors. The other players take turns trying to guess, and the person who guesses becomes "it". If someone guesses twice before others have had a turn to be "it", the play moves to the right to the next person who has not yet been "it". As a variation, the players can ask "it" yes/no or other agreed-upon questions.

## Syntax Attack

For this activity you will need a bag for drawing tiles. You can select tiles that are appropriate to your theme/topic. In turn, each child reaches in and pulls out two tiles. He is asked to orally compose a sentence integrating those two terms. To encourage embedded clauses, I sometimes add a spinner with selected clausal connectors such as "if", "because", "but", "unless", "until", "before", "and", "while", "when", etc.

## Riddle Me This

In the "Secret Square" instructions, one picture is selected from a group and a counter is hidden under that picture. The players then ask yes/no questions and eliminate pictures until left with the correct one. This is an excellent game to teach deductive reasoning and formulation of yes/no questions. Some students, however, aren't ready to formulate questions. Here's a variation that works well for them and that allows the clinician to gear tasks to each player's specific needs and abilities.

Select 25, 36 or 49 tiles and arrange them in an array, picture sides up. Hide a chip under one picture. You will then provide a "clue" to the first player. After hearing the clue, the players discuss which pictures to eliminate based on your information. The next player is given a new clue, and so on until the players *as a team* can guess. It's the kids against the teacher - and they win every time! Here are some types of clues (and examples) you can use to individualize this game among its players:

*function: This can go in the water.*

*exclusionary: This is not furry.*

*phonemic: This starts with a /w/ sound.*

*comparative: This is bigger than a book.*

*attributes: This is usually grey.*

*science: This is alive.*

*category: This is a mammal.*

## Story Chain

For this activity you will need a bag for drawing tiles.. For the sake of variety, it is recommended using all of the tiles. Player one is reminded that he will be starting the story, and is asked to draw the first tile. The tile is placed on the table. At this point it's a good idea for the group to discuss possible elements of the story, i.e. when and where the story will take place. Player one then starts the story with at least one sentence. Player two draws a tile and places it next to the first tile. He/she paraphrases player one's information and adds to the story incorporating the picture on the new tile. Play continues, with each player using the "chain" of tiles as visual cues to recall the story and adding new information. The length of the story will vary with the ages/abilities of the students, but 8-10 tiles is average. Cue the group that the next player will be concluding the story; the group can discuss possible endings, with the final player deciding which to use. Variation: have the group vote on the ending. To reinforce memory/sequencing skills keep a list of the tile pictures (or stack them in order and secure with a rubber band) and put them out again next session; ask your students to use the pictures to retell the story.

## Sidewalk

This game can be used for articulation or language; simply select tiles appropriate to your students' needs ( 40-50 tiles). You'll also need a die or spinner and coloured pawns or chips to use as markers. Standard game pawns fit perfectly on "Secret Square" or 3 for Me tiles. Make a "game board" by arranging the tiles, face DOWN, in a "sidewalk" pattern. This can be a city block, a "spiral", or any other closed or open-ended shape. Designate a "start" square, but have student hold on to their pawns until they roll/spin. You can also designate a "finish" tile, see below. Player one moves his pawn the number of spaces indicated and turns that tile over. That picture is used for the required speech or language task. The player's tile remains on the tile and the tile remains face up. Play continues with these two rules: 1) If a player lands on a face-up tile, he gets to go again after completing the task (thus does two tasks that turn). If a player lands on an OCCUPIED tile, the pawn already on that tile goes back 3 spaces PLUS the player gets to roll again after completing the task. Play continues until (select one):

- half of the tiles are turned over (adds a math factor)
- a preset timer goes off
- a player reaches a designated "finish" tile (open-ended arrangement is recommended if you designate a finish tile)

Variation: Various game board arrangements can be laid out using pre-cut squares on poster board; laminate these and you have a system that the kids can set up easily.